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SUBJECT: BABIL POLITICAL JOCKEYING PUTS FORMER GOVERNOR WITWIT IN
KING-MAKER ROLE

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of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) The final election results for the Babil Provincial Council (PC) give Da'wa (eight seats) a somewhat slimmer lead over ISCI (five seats) than had been originally expected based on preliminary results, although some difficult bargaining still lies ahead. Da'wa has established alliances with the Sadrist Free People's Trend (three seats) and Ja'faari's Reform Trend (three), which should give it 14 seats. Da'wa will also need former Governor Witwit's Independent Civil Society (three seats) to secure a majority on the 30-seat PC, and Witwit is driving a hard bargain, according to several senior provincial political leaders.

¶2. (U) The Independent Justice Party, which won three seats, was actually formed by ISCI to attract independent voters. Together with Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National List (three seats) and outgoing PC Chairman Massoudi's Independent Supporters Bloc (two seats), ISCI can count on 13 votes. The other Ansar Independent candidate elected to the PC, Fahim Mane'a Allawi, has evidently had a parting with the party leader and outgoing PC Chair Mohammed Al-Massoudi and is being courted by Da'wa. Even if Da'wa were successful in this, or in also tempting at least one member of the pro-ISCI Justice Coalition to defect, it will not achieve a majority.

¶3. (C) This leaves Iskander Witwit in the role of king-maker. He is reportedly seeking the Governorship as the price for his support, although Da'wa and others claim that they are not prepared to cede this. Da'wa and Sadrist leaders say they are prepared to offer Witwit the position of Provincial Council Chairman, but it is not clear that this will satisfy him. ISCI is also courting Witwit, a avowed secularist, but an accord is a long shot.

¶4. (U) Of the 30 newly-elected PC members, only eight are carryovers from the previous council, representing a minimal amount of continuity. Twenty-two of the former 41 members of the outgoing PC ran for reelection, so almost two-thirds were rejected by the voters. Matching this result with the high expectations of the voters suggests a tough time for this new, less-experienced council as it learns its job and works at giving the voters what they want - improved essential services.

HILLAS